

# *A sensitive and ethical approach to studying youth in refugee detention centers*

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Ethics, as a way of deciding between good and bad actions, is closely entrenched with the activity of collecting data from or about human participants – a common and current activity in most social sciences, including Criminology. Empirical research is relevant in solving pressing social problems but cannot be conducted at any cost, especially when there are (social, emotional, physical, economic, legal) risks to participants or when participants in research are especially vulnerable.

This presentation deals with ethical considerations when studying unaccompanied migrant minors in detention centers, due to their particularly vulnerable situations. The intersection of them being underage, in state detention facilities and with no legal representatives demands from researchers extra ethical precautions to which, in turn, are added new layers of complexity when frequently the minors are simultaneously labeled as victims (of human trafficking or smuggling) and offenders (undocumented and illegal migrants). At a time of continued migratory flows and increased border control, criminologists need to keep studying migrants and refugees, including children, and, thus, anticipate ethical challenges and dilemmas.

Examples from a prolonged fieldwork in a detention center in Greece will be used, presenting the ethical reasoning used to overcome many of the challenges and dilemmas, particularly when recruiting participants, building trust and creating rapport, asking for informed consent from minors, safeguarding their well-being, minimizing harm and potential for re-traumatization and neutralizing power imbalances. It will be concluded that training researchers on ethical principles is crucial, but that frequently ethical dilemmas will arise during fieldwork and that researchers need to learn how to “be” ethical and integrate ethical decision making into all steps of the research process. This presentation is one step further into that learning process.

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